

Steps to Opportunity

Through its government affairs program, ASSE can open the door to professional opportunities, much like it did for NIOSH's recent Steps symposium. "But members must step through the door to take advantage," explains Dave Heidorn, ASSE's manager of government affairs and policy. "The quality and extent of ASSE involvement depends entirely on ASSE members." Contact Heidorn at dheidorn@asse.org.

ASSE was invited to participate in NIOSH's Steps symposium because of its partnership with NIOSH, which was established in fall 2003 and renewed on Dec. 17, 2004 (see pg. 1). The NIOSH partnership, as well as ASSE's alliances with OSHA and MSHA, have resulted in various opportunities that fulfill several goals of ASSE and its government affairs program.

Most important is the meaningful opportunity ASSE members have to share their wealth of expertise and experience. At the symposium, Fred Drennan, Jim Ramsay and Maureen Johnson—ASSE's member-driven Wellness Task Force—were given an influential stage on which to demonstrate their long-established leadership and commitment to the cutting-edge idea of integrating individual wellness and health with occupational safety and health (see pg. 50 for more). That visibility provides them an opportunity both to advance a public policy issue and to raise awareness of the kind of membership organization ASSE is. Ultimately, their contributions open doors for other ASSE members on other issues as we continue to build a positive, multi-faceted relationship with NIOSH.

Steps proved the unique dynamic that characterizes ASSE and its members. Through the partnership and other activities, ASSE's government affairs can open the doors to opportunities. But the quality and extent of ASSE involvement depends entirely on ASSE members.

Maureen Johnson provided a valuable corporate connection to NIOSH's Steps efforts that was in place before ASSE asked her to participate in the Wellness Task Force. Often, members' relationships with their employers provide an added dimension that agencies such as NIOSH are seeking. Members working with their employers provide positive exposure and outcomes for both the member and the employer, which can reflect positively on ASSE, too, as it did in this case.

Jim Ramsay provided the most visible, vocal representation of the safety profession itself at Steps. His decade of leading academic work on this issue provided a level of expertise which successfully backed the argument that SH&E professionals can provide necessary leadership to advance this issue.

If not for Fred Drennan's commitment, it's

hard to imagine what ASSE's involvement would have been. Fred used his skills as a consultant to involve himself at the very highest level of the planning process, got to know NIOSH staff and put himself in a position to help them develop the direction for Steps. He even got a prominent space for ASSE's booth at the event.

A corporate safety and health leader, an academic and a consultant, each using unique skills, knowledge and perspective to help NIOSH put forward integrating wellness as a valuable workplace issue to be considered. Outside the Society's PDC, is there a better representation of the breadth and depth of ASSE member capability than what these three members provided all at one time?

The unifying Steps message that should drive ASSE member interest in integrating personal wellness with occupational safety and health is that this nation's healthcare system is in crisis.

Presenters repeatedly noted that if employers cannot reign in healthcare costs which have grown in double-digit percentages over the last four years, employer commitment to providing healthcare coverage to employees will rapidly disappear. That is why companies are interested in wellness. They know the safety- and health-related

issues do not conveniently stop at either side of the company door.

Steps was a kick-off of an opportunity for ASSE members to add another dimension to their value to employers. It is another opportunity to prove the value of safety to the corporate bottom line.

Maureen, Jim and Fred will continue as ASSE's Wellness Task Force and will work to find more occasions to expand this opportunity. A next step will be PDC sessions on wellness, including one by Fred specifically targeted at advancing the Steps opportunity.

Government affairs can achieve greater awareness of ASSE members, ASSE and the SH&E profession. But all of those efforts should, in the long run, help to provide direct professional opportunities for members. Wellness is one of those direct opportunities.

In the end, while ASSE can open the door to an opportunity such as Steps, members must step through the door to take advantage. In the case of Steps, members ran through, carrying an ASSE banner to the benefit of all members who likewise decide to walk through this open door.

